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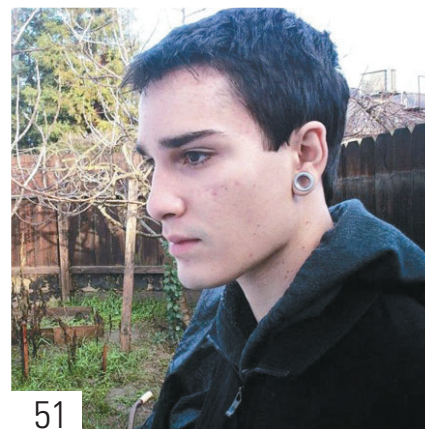
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ON THE COVER

Ste (David Darrow's back) and Jamie (Steven Lee Johnson facing) grapple with young love in *Beautiful Thing*. Photo by George Byron Griffiths



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I ADMIT it. I've had some work done. A cognitive nip here, a mental tuck there. I feel good. Heck, I look good. Whether we're willing to admit it or not, all of us could probably benefit from having a professional get in our heads every once in a while. Look under the hood. Monitor the dipstick. It's maintenance.

Maintenance usually involves an overhaul. An overhaul of my ideas and what I hold to be true. What I consider when I make decisions. What I cling to as validation for my choices. Ideas that may not actually be accurate. It is a very real and very common tenet of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy that we humans believe distortions. We cling to versions of reality that can be found anywhere on the spectrum between truth and fallacy.

I joke with my friends that we shouldn't let my copays go to waste whenever I share a kernel of knowledge from my work with psychology professionals. Many of the lessons are easily applicable across a broad base. The basis of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy is that our emotions affect our thoughts which affect our behaviors. It's triangular between the three. What we think changes how we feel and then how we act. Likewise, how we act changes how we think and feel. And, how we feel changes how we act and think. Stay with me.

If I look in the mirror and think "I look fat" and feel shame and then I reach for a candy bar, I will probably feel sad because I'll think "I'm a failure" because I just ate a candy bar and will still look fat.

Not so unfamiliar a thought pattern, is it? Thinking, emotions, and behavior. Right there. But, it's not always as easy to see the triangle happening between the three—sometimes the thoughts are really ingrained and subliminal and the actions are veiled even to ourselves. It gets hairy. It's why the professionals get paid to do their jobs.

I remember the day that my particular professional handed me a paper with the 15 Cognitive Distortions listed on it. Google it. You'll find them, too. They've been accepted and they're used widely in helping people to figure out how we might see things a little less accurately than they really are. I was pretty pissed that day. Being shown—not told—that something isn't how I thought it is tends to be a pill I don't swallow very happily.

What? You mean that I shouldn't save my friend from herself? I should just let her throw her life away and go down the road to ruin because she's making a choice that I don't agree with? How could I live with myself for letting her do that? How could I stay friends with her after failing her so?

You see, I was a caretaker, among other things. I knew what people should do, how they should do it, and when they should do it. I could give you ten reasons why it should be done and assure you that Andy knows best. But you know what? Andy didn't know best. That is simply untrue. It was a distortion. Consider the 15 Cognitive Distortions that I paraphrase from those presented by Aaron Beck and David Burns. With each, I'm including a small example from my distortion arsenal:

1. Filtering: Taking the positive aspects out of a situation and focusing only on the negative. "That typo ruined the whole magazine."
2. Polarized Thinking: Things are either/or—there's no gray, but just black or white. "Either I answer all the emails in my inbox immediately or I'm not doing my job right."
3. Overgeneralization: If something happens once, we might think it'll always happen that way. "I didn't get any feedback from that Facebook post, nobody cares. I'm going to stop posting."
4. Jumping to Conclusions: Without having firsthand knowledge, we think we know what someone else will do or what they're thinking, particularly about us. "Oh, he's super busy and important. He doesn't want to talk to me."

5. Catastrophizing: Using the "what if" scenario to try to minimize or maximize a situation out of proportion. "What if I print that review and someone doesn't like it and the world ends?"
6. Personalization: This happens when we interpret unrelated events to be about us. "She just walked across the room when I got here—she hates me. She's probably talking about me right now to that person. Look. He scowled. He hates me, too."
7. Control Fallacies: External control fallacies include those that are based upon things happening to us, "My piece isn't that good because my internet connection was bad and I couldn't research"; internal control fallacies are those that are based upon what we think we caused, "Why are you upset? Because of something I did?"
8. Fallacy of Fairness: We think we know what is fair and we expect people to agree with us. "It was my turn to get the good assignment even though she knows more about the subject. I should've gotten to pick."
9. Blaming: We either blame others for our feelings, "He makes me feel worthless"; or blame ourselves too much, "I'm just being too sensitive again."
10. Shoulds: We have ironclad rules about how people should behave. "She should have gotten me a card, I remembered her birthday and got her one."
11. Emotional Reasoning: We believe that what we feel must be true, automatically. "I'm sad because you said that, therefore you must be wrong."
12. Fallacy of Change: We expect people to change to our liking if we pressure or cajole them enough. "He knows I hate it when he drinks too much, he'll stop doing it for me."
13. Global Labeling: Taking one error and making it true for all situations. "She didn't tell me the truth. She is a liar." Or, "She moved to another city. She always abandons her friends."
14. Being Right: We always have to be right no matter what the circumstances are or how it makes another person feel. "Didn't I tell you that was a mistake? Yeah. I was right."
15. Heaven's Reward Fallacy: We expect our self-sacrifices to pay off, as if there's a big scoreboard in the sky. "I just need to grin and bear it. Then, I'm sure I'll get the raise I deserve."

Here's the deal. There might be some truths to these claims but there might not be. Where we get into trouble is when we base our thoughts, actions, and feelings on these ideas without pausing to reflect. Depending on the typo, it could ruin a magazine. A person can be busy and not want to talk, but I won't know until I ask...and suggest a different time to talk. Things beyond our control can impede our progress but we can also mitigate problems by way of what we can control. Nobody will change because you want them to. And yes, some victories are hard won, but we shouldn't have to suffer as a matter of course to get what we want in life.

I know which distortions I tend to cling to—I come by some of them honestly as a Scandinavian Lutheran Martyr...and some of them I've developed on my own, lobbying shoulds and shouldn'ts around like grenades.

It's when I can look at that list and laugh that I know I'm on the right track. I can see them. I can laugh at them. And, I can try not to think them. That's when I can avoid the triangle of negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that might lead me to make unhealthy choices. If I see a situation for what it is and try to change it, I may not need to find a way to cope with it. I may just change my true reality to be better.

At the end of the day, what I hope for all of us is that our realities can be truthful and, in them, we can find comfort. And, if we need to, get a little work done. Spread our copays around. Pay it forward.

With thanks,

Andy □

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Bats, Bees and Poisoned Gold

AMIDST THE arguments for and denials of global warming and its dire consequences, humans will probably exit suddenly, still squabbling, bequeath Gaia's remains to the cockroaches.

We might delay our demise by accepting the fact of the empirically proven events, foregoing the squabbling long enough to tend to repairs—if we still have time.

Take bats. An intractable white fungus is killing millions of them in the Northeast, and a recent *Time* Magazine article notes estimates of some 6 million deaths may be low. Why care if bats become extinct? For one reason, the little critters can eat up to their body weight in insects nightly. Ask: What costs to human health and crop destruction the existence of millions of pounds of uneaten insects?

Honey bees, too, have been dying worldwide with speculations on the cause ranging from infestations of varroa mites to farm insecticide poisoning. Would climate changes affect the proliferation of mites? Certainly the insecticides are human borne. What happens when these busy pollinators can't perform their tasks?

Down in Peru, notes the latest *Smithsonian*, chain saws decimate

centuries-old rain forest trees to ravage the earth below for gold. In their wake only wasteland and rock piles remain. Local ecosystems are erased, mining contaminants pour into surrounding waters, workers die in cave-ins or are poisoned as they work mercury and mud with their bare feet to produce gold amalgam. Who can blame the workers who may make up to \$600 a day instead of their average \$30 a month? At the top of the food chain are the few who reap \$1,700 and ounce for the gold.

These topics won't appear in the *grand guignol* of the presidential debates, but they are losses that *are* occurring, whether or not they are denied.

Galileo Galilei may not actually have muttered before the Inquisition, after recanting the earth's movement around the sun, "E pur si muove" – "And yet it moves," but he did state, "I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use." Like a chemical reaction where one final, added drop turns a clear liquid pink, the ongoing, worldwide events may also precipitate suddenly, into—*what?* ▣



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Politics of Scandal

I was born Catholic and hope to die Catholic. Despite its scandals, the church still speaks words of healing, hope and freedom to me. Right now, however, I feel scandalized by how the leadership of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, particularly Archbishop John C. Nienstedt, has repeatedly chosen to treat the LGBT community in just the opposite way.

While I disagree with church teaching on this matter on psychological and theological grounds, arguing is futile. I suspect LGBT issues are this generation's birth control. What follows is less an argument than a cry of grief for the lives and loves I see demeaned and deadened.

Church teaching and the gospel are not identical, and all historically conditioned teaching must be judged against the demands of the gospel at a particular time and place—a gospel less about judgment than about love, compassion and inclusion.

Declaring gay sexual orientation objectively disordered and then labeling sexual love and companionship to gay persons as sinful are teachings that demean the divine and human spirit. These teachings, I am afraid, have less to do with divinely decreed teaching than with social control and institutionalized fear and homophobia. These are ethical issues I would like to see the church address.

The church has a right to attempt to influence public opinion. As a result, Catholics last year received DVDs urging them to defend marriage or risk social and moral chaos. As a follow up, the Minnesota Catholic Conference is now mounting a statewide initiative to drum up support for inserting the definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman into the state constitution. What I cannot support, however, is making support for the marriage amendment a litmus test for being faithfully Catholic.

On a more personal level, certain of the archbishop's actions have been embarrassingly callous. He once refused communion to gay-identified college kids, and he is now asking Catholics to pray his recently written Marriage Prayer. His decision to include the "one man and one woman" language directly into the prayer strikes me as an exploitation

of religious sentiment and practice in the service of political ideology. Mixing religion and politics is always dangerous, but disguising discrimination as virtue and prayer is particularly perilous.

At the most personal level, I serve as a spiritual director for lots of Catholics and Catholic priests. In this role I see first hand the destructiveness that can come from automatically imposing abstract principles on real lives. Church teaching appears increasingly irrelevant to younger LGBT folks, but their parents are sternly warned today about the sinful consequences of expressing any acceptance of the gay identity of their children. Many priests—especially gay priests—feel particularly compromised, and I talk with Catholic after Catholic looking for convincing reasons to stay in the church.

Invoking their promise of obedience, the archbishop has instructed deacons and priests that they are not to disagree publicly with this stand. If it becomes an issue of conscience for any of them, the archbishop has asked them to contact him directly. At least one priest has nonetheless disagreed publicly with this initiative, and his has been advised that his priestly faculties could be in jeopardy. The archbishop's stand and instructions were strongly affirmed by the younger priests who are glad to see doctrinal and moral orthodoxy finally being addressed. In certain circles there is a movement to see the tactics of the archdiocese and the Minnesota Catholic Conference serve as a national model.

Catholic Church teaching on LGBT issues will not change anytime soon. Given this reality, Archdiocesan leadership can, however, decide to act more compassionately and less judgmentally. I would invite the archbishop just to listen to LGBT people talk about their lives, loves and faith. Just listen and at least temporarily hold the impulse to judge in check.

Joe McHugh is a spiritual director and retreat leader based in the Twin Cities. He can be reached through www.joemchugh-associates.com.

Against the Amendment

December 3rd, 2011 my husband Dean and I celebrated our 6th wedding anniversary.

Dean proposed to me on my 40th birthday. After being together for five years, and opening the Wilde Roast Café together, we knew our love would last.

I have to admit, I didn't see the point of a wedding because it wasn't legal, but I knew how important this wedding was to him. So we planned the day together.

On December 3, 2005 we got married in a Lodge in Hayward, Wisconsin with eighty of our friends and family members present. The field stone fireplace was filling the log lodge with warmth while the snow was lightly falling outside. We had picked this location because of its meaning to us. We spent many long weekends at this lodge and we wanted to share it with our family and friends.

I knew my family would be there, but we were worried about Dean's conservative farm family (we had not received any RSVP's back from them). I knew it would be an emotional night when I saw his family arrive. When the Reverend Paul Tucker said, "Some people think what we are doing tonight is radical, but love is radical," his family broke into tears.

That is when I knew why Dean wanted to marry me. It was to know we had the support of our families and friends. He wanted to show them how important I was to him. I now know why people get married. It is powerful to feel the love and support of your family. It is wonderful to know they will be there for you always. We felt the sacred; our God was present.

I call Dean my husband because we are married. Our God and our family blessed our marriage. On our anniversary, as I think about the anti-gay marriage amendment, I wish the Minnesotans who want to deny marriage to couples like us find it in their hearts to get to know families like ours.

I am married and my husband and I will be celebrating our wedding anniversary for years to come.

Tom DeGree, Lake Elmo. Running for Minnesota State Representative in (currently) District 56A

A Call to Action for Catholics

In 2012, Minnesotans will vote on an amendment to the state constitution that

would officially define marriage as an institution between one man and one woman.

The Catholic Church, a tax-exempt institution, is getting heavily involved in the contentious and political debate over this constitutional change.

The Church is throwing its weight behind the proposed amendment. The Archdiocese of Minneapolis/St. Paul, under the leadership of Archbishop Nienstedt, are planning to create committees in every Minnesota Catholic church in an effort to rally support for the anti-marriage amendment.

The Catholic Church has a habit of placing itself on the wrong side of issues that can be traced back for centuries. They are doing it once again in Minnesota. I question what, 20 years from now, people will be saying about this move the Catholic Church has made regarding gay rights? Will it be seen in the same light as those who rallied against the civil rights of African Americans in the 1960's. Only time will tell.

How can we look to the Catholic Church for moral guidance when it's own history is dark with sin? Which is more abhorrent in your mind: homosexuality or an international cover-up meant to hide the actions of pedophiles led by the Vatican?

I ask all Catholics to conduct some serious introspection over this issue before participating on these committees. Make your voice known in your church and within your own diocese. Vote with your feet if your priest decides to conduct a sermon on the subject of the amendment or homosexuality. There is no greater teaching of Jesus than social justice.

I was born and raised into a Catholic family. I was educated in a Catholic school. I understand the culture and politics of the Catholic community and I know from my Catholic education and upbringing that what the Archdiocese is doing is wrong.

The Catholic Church is in the process of shooting themselves in the foot. The de-

structive and divisive politics of Archbishop Nienstedt and every priest who follows his lead are to blame. It is up to the parishioners of church to stand up to Archbishop Nienstedt and tell him what he is doing is wrong.

2012 is going to be a contentious election year in the state of Minnesota with the Presidential election and the constitutional amendment. Millions of dollars will be flowing into the state for and against this amendment. We should be asking ourselves, "What is the church doing to calm the fears and inflammatory rhetoric? How are they creating unity amongst the citizens?"

The Catholic Church must retain it's focus where it is needed, feeding the poor and sheltering the homeless, not turning it's back on it's own parishioners and fostering hatred. □

Michael Pfarr, Minneapolis



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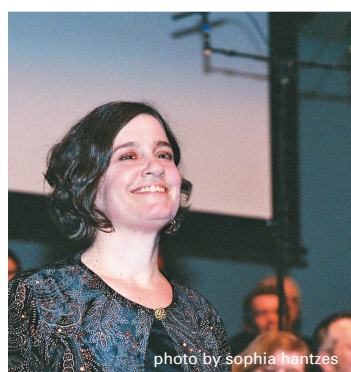
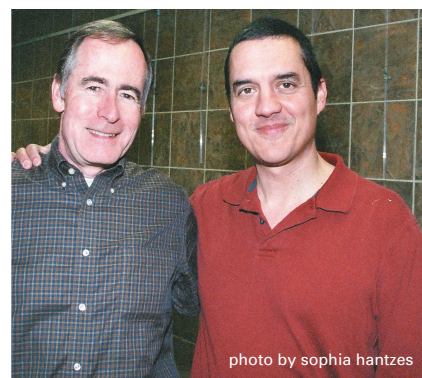
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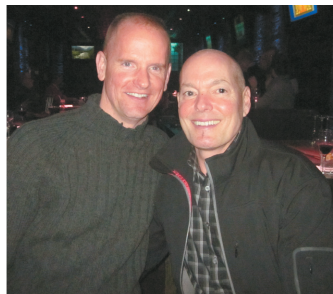
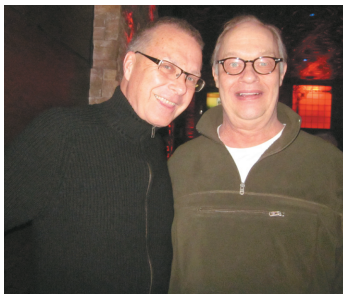
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BEAT- ING THE WINTER BLUES



THIS WINTER has thus far been pleasantly mild for Minnesota—mild enough that some people have kept the radio waves busy pondering global climate change. However, even a moderate season can give you a touch of the winter blues, or as they're often now known, Seasonal Affective Disorder (*or* it's amusing little acronym, SAD). It's estimated that about 10-20% of the general population have at least a mild version of SAD, and somewhat predictably, it seems that the percentage is higher as one goes north.

There are many causes for SAD. As the days are shorter, we have less exposure to sunlight, and the sunlight that we do get isn't first thing in the morning. That lack can disrupt your normal sleep patterns, leading to fatigue. Thomas Wehr, a researcher at the National Institute of Mental Health, believes that melatonin could be another culprit. Extra melatonin can make you sleepy, and Wehr found that suffers of SAD had abnormally high levels of melatonin during the winter.

Then there are the other contributing factors: many people engage in less physical activity in the winter, don't eat as healthily as they do in the summer, and are less likely to venture out to socialize with family and friends. All those little changes can add up to a big problem; ultimately, SAD can cause anxiety, suicidal thoughts, depression, and poor concentration. SAD is bad enough in the general population, but it can have a larger impact on some members of the GLBT community who might not have the same family support system that the rest of the population enjoys.

David Hancox, Executive Director with Metropolitan Centers for Independent Living (MCIL) explains, "If you're already feeling isolated, and you add the additional isolation that's brought on by the weather, I think that begins to compound the situation, and can result in some behaviors that are associated with Seasonal Affective Disorder or depres- ➔



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David Hancox, MCIL. Photo by Andy Lien

sion.”

Likewise, for those who have a disability or a mental health issue, winter can add an extra layer of stress. Debra Martin-Schloer, Clinical Director of Metro Counseling and Family Resources at Lutheran Social Service (LSS) states, “SAD is quite common, and for some, the symptoms grow worse as the winter progresses. And if you are managing clinical depression, this can sometimes exacerbate the experience.”

If you know or suspect that you are affected by SAD, there are things you can do to mitigate its symptoms. Medications like Paxil and Prozac can help, as well as increasing your exposure to light. Treatment can also be as easy as adjusting your physical activity level and changing your diet. Kimberia Sherva, Co-facilitator with the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI), says, “It has been proven that when you exercise, it stimulates your serotonin. And that’s the chemical that ➔

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Corbett Laubignat, MCIL. Photo by Andy Lien

some people have a lack of. ...and even a little exercise can boost that.” She adds, “Try to eat healthy. Green leafy vegetables have certain vitamins in them that help your brain chemistry. And believe it or not, salmon has vitamin E; Vitamin E has been known to help as well.” Sherva also recommends reaching out to your support system, and making time for activities you enjoy.

NAMI, LSS and CIL all offer a wide range of services to keep our community healthy throughout the year. CIL (mcil-mn.org) helps individuals living with disabilities gain independent living skills, and offers personal attendant services. CIL also manages the Disability Linkage Line (1-866-333-2466)— a hotline that connects callers to a wealth of information and resources throughout the state. Additionally, CIL hosts a support group tailored specifically to those in the GLBT community who have disabilities. “The GLBT support group was originally started because individu-



als with disabilities who were also GLBT were feeling like they were living with a bit of a double whammy, if you will," Hancox states. "They were finding they were rejected by the GLBT community, and then rejected by the disability community—they face alienation from both groups. The group gives individuals with that commonality an opportunity and a place to come together...to talk amongst themselves about the challenges, and maybe find some resolution or find ➡

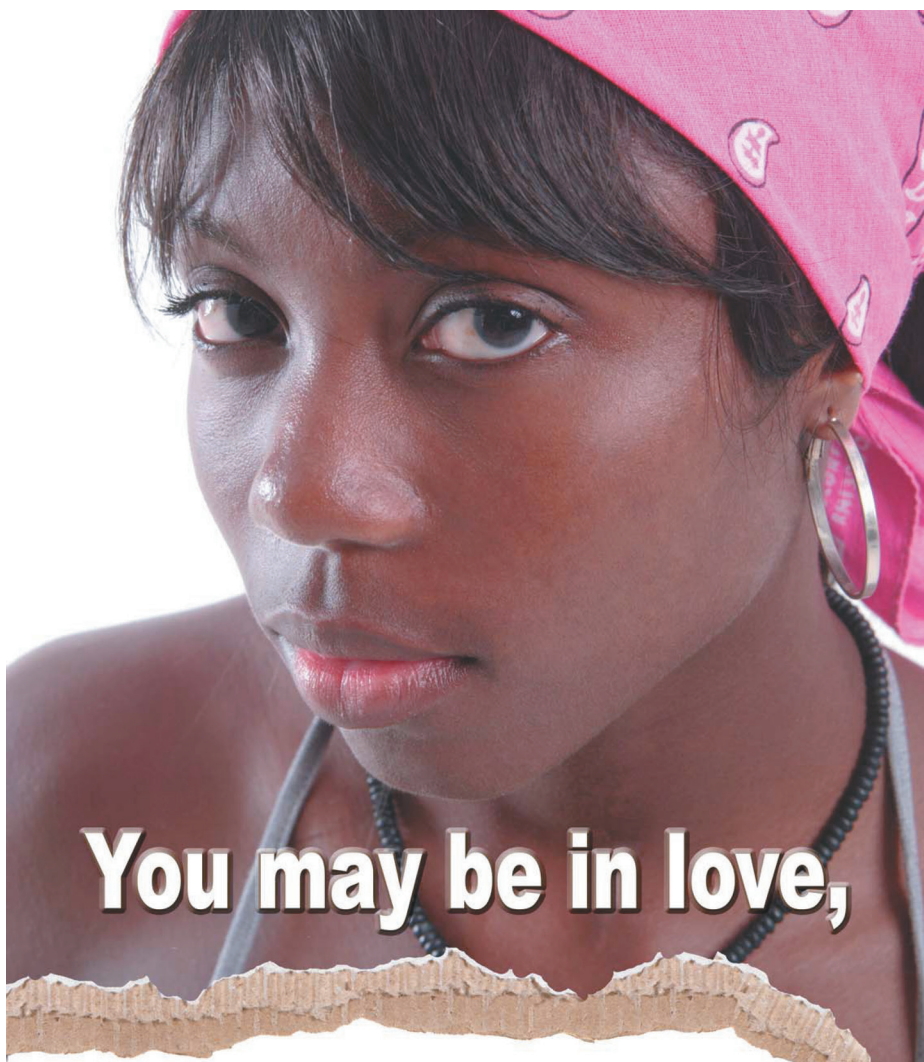


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Kimberia Sherva, NAMI. Photo by Laurie Peterson Buck

some camaraderie. To sit down and have a conversation with somebody who really gets it and understands.” Attending the support group is free; for more information, email the group’s facilitator at corbettl@mcil-mn.org.

In addition to offering education, support, and advocacy for persons with mental illness, this past October, NAMI Minnesota (namihelps.org) started a facilitated support group specifically for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people and their allies who struggle with mental illness. Meeting once a week on Saturdays from 1:00-2:30 at Living Table United Church of Christ (formerly Spirit of the Lakes), the group offers support, advice and encouragement, and every now and then a little tough love. Co-facilitator Sherva states, “You know how they say it takes a village to raise a child? It’s kind of the same with mental illness, because honestly, the most successful people dealing with a mental illness are the people who have a strong



support network.” She adds, “When you do it the right way, the person feels supported, feels acknowledged...and can focus on recovery.”

If you need more individual care or are considering medication, LSS (www.lssmn.org) might be a good place to start. LSS offers counseling and psychiatric help as well as therapy groups that address management of anxiety and depression. To begin the intake process, call 612-879-5320. “We consider the intake process an opportunity to listen and see if we can help,” concludes Martin-Schloer. With sixteen mental health professionals at multiple locations throughout the metro area, LSS also can provide counseling services to individuals in Alexandria, Brainerd, Fergus Falls, Mankato, Willmar, Detroit Lakes, and St. Cloud.

Staring down the specter of February, it’s nice to know that there is a wealth of resources out there for anyone who needs a little help getting through another winter. All things come to an end, and winter doesn’t last forever. But if you experience Seasonal Affective Disorder, there’s no reason you have to tough it out all on your own. □

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GLBT YOUTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Seeking Intersection of Support

THE TABOO regarding substance abuse and addiction are lessening thanks to the media and shows like *Addicted*, *Intervention*, and even *Dr. Drew's Celebrity Rehab*; bringing the reality of this disease mainstream. This has been a conversation starter for people, and has opened society's eyes to the many faces of addiction.

While many gains are being made in understanding the disease of Addiction, much still needs to be done to mainstream the understanding of how substance abuse impacts various cultures in different ways. Through my work, I often hear stories of teens who are questioning their sexuality who, unable to reach out to GLBTQ adults or mentors, reach for substances instead as they are not sure how to navigate their first sexual encounters and are unsure of how the revealing their orientation will be received. Not only can substances hinder these experiences, the heightened risk for physical and sexual abuse that accompanies chemical use cannot be ignored.

A study by Dr. Michael P. Marshal of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center revealed that GLBT teens are 190 percent more likely to use drugs and alcohol than are heterosexual teens, and that the usage rate is even higher among certain subgroups. For example, Marshal's study, which was published in the April 2008 edition of the journal *Addiction*, documented that the prevalence of drug or alcohol use among bisexual youth is 340 percent greater than the rate among straight teens. Among lesbian youth, the number rises to 400 percent (McBride, 2011).

While becoming more accepted in mainstream society, there is still a stigma attached to being chemically dependent. Being a member of the GLBT community, we are also aware of the attitudes that are bestowed upon us. There are a number of resources for those who are addicted, and there are a number of supports to the gay community, but there are not enough resources to adequately meet the needs when these two issues are *combined*.

In the community currently, there is a significant number of us who abuse substances or who are chemically addicted. Moreover, for both youth and adults who do not live in the Twin Cities, there is another hurdle to overcome, which is a furthered lack of resources. Regardless of location, it is vital that we are able to lean upon one another to get the support that we need.

This is not just a call to support queer and questioning youth to help guide them in healthy ways, this is a call to put pride into ourselves and our community and to become healthier overall so that we might have a chance to demonstrate to those who are coming out and joining us—regardless of age—can be mentored and supported without resorting to the use of chemicals to navigate all of the important “firsts” that are part of our lives.

RESOURCES FOR GLBT SUBSTANCE ABUSE:

- 1.) Element Mental Health Services: Element's chemical dependency currently is running a GLBT-specific primary outpatient group and an outpatient group for the general public. Both groups currently have openings and are taking referrals and are Rule 31 licensed and a Minnesota provider. Element also takes most insurances and is able to work with the ones not currently contracted with to get funding. Element Mental Health Services - St. Cloud
<http://elementmentalhealth.vpweb.com/>
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- 2.) AA Intergroup – Minneapolis: Access to all Alcoholics Anonymous groups including GLBT specific groups. Alcoholics Anonymous Intergroup – Minneapolis
<http://www.aaminneapolis.org/>
(952) 922-0880
- 3.) AA Intergroup – Saint Paul: Access to all Alcoholics Anonymous groups including GLBT specific groups. Alcoholics Anonymous Intergroup – St. Paul and Surrounding Suburbs
<http://www.aastpaul.org/>
(651) 227-5502
- 4.) Avenues for Homeless Youth: Provides safe and nurturing emergency shelter, short term housing and support services for homeless youth. Coordinates the GLBT Host Home Program – has a Chemical Dependency element for youth. Avenues for Homeless Youth - Minneapolis
<http://www.avenuesforyouth.org/>
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- 5.) PRIDE Institute: PRIDE Institute is committed to providing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people a road to recovery through evidence-based substance abuse, sexual health, and mental health treatment. PRIDE Institute - Eden Prairie
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Tamarah L. Gehlen MA LAMFT LADC CFLE CCTP is the Program Director for WINGS treatment center in Litchfield, Minnesota, and specializes in working with addicted teens and their families as well as individuals. She is the editor for the LGBT Therapist Group E Newsletter, and provides lectures and training throughout the state of Minnesota on various topics. Tamarah can be reached at gehlenccounseling@yahoo.com or on the web at www.tamarahgehlen.com.



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community with dignity, safety and hope.

Support Sites

Are you looking for support? Do you know someone who could use some direction? Here is a list of GLBT Support Websites that covers not only the metropolitan area, but also the greater state of Minnesota. It's a small sample of what's available out there once you start looking. Of particular note are the college and university websites for GLBT resources—not only are they great for the students, but they are a wealth of information for members of the GLBT community in the area of the schools as well. Explore. Find each other. Support.

OutFront Minnesota



Leading Minnesota Toward LGBT Equality. Website is a wealth of support information for jobs, LGBT organizations, friendly places of worship, or help in coming out and covers resources across the entire state. Minneapolis, MN • www.outfront.org

Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Services at the University of Minnesota Duluth



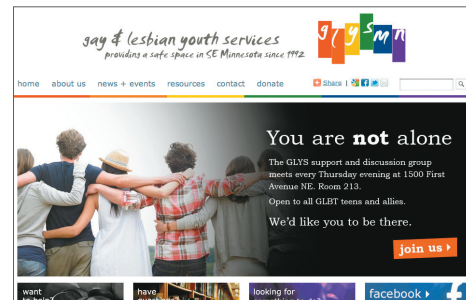
Develops, coordinates, implements and evaluates programs and services that affirm GLBT people and their allies in support of their academic success and social development, while encouraging an environment which promotes and appreciates multiculturalism. Duluth, MN • www.d.umn.edu/mlrc/glb

Trans Youth Support Network



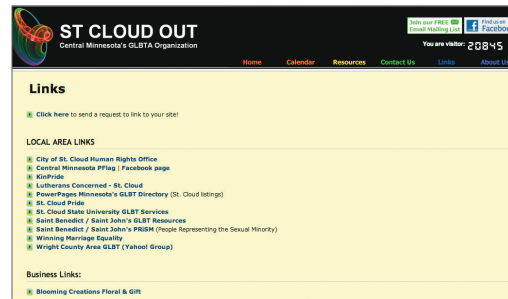
The Trans Youth Support Network is a partnership of youth and community members working together to support trans youth in Minnesota. Minneapolis, MN
www.transyouthsupportnetwork.org

Gay & Lesbian Youth Services



Supporting the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth of Southeastern Minnesota since 1992 in a confidential and nonjudgmental atmosphere that allows them to be themselves. Rochester, MN • www.glysmn.org

St. Cloud OUT



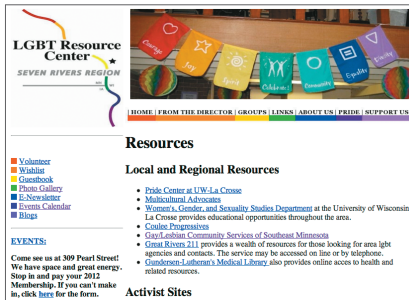
Provides solidarity and support to area GLBTA organizations, foster communication among the various groups, support initiatives undertaken by members of the GLBTA community. St. Cloud, MN • www.stcloudout.org

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Center at Mankato State University



Feel Safe. Be Proud. Find Community. Become a Leader. Provides support, advocacy, referral, and sense of community to LGBTQQA students. Mankato, MN • www.mnsu.edu/lgbtc

The LGBT Resource Center for the Seven Rivers Region



Fosters understanding and builds connections on issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity to the 7 Rivers Region through education, events, and programming.
LaCrosse, WI • www.7riverslgbt.org

GLBT in Recovery



Created to aid the recovery community in staying clean and sober. Coordinates awareness and education about recovery in the GLBT community and provide clean and sober social events.
Minneapolis, MN (and other locations)
www.glbtinrecovery.com

The Family Partnership



Through counseling, education programs and advocacy, they support families in need and empower them to solve problems. Extensive listing of GLBT family support organizations and resources. Minneapolis, MN
www.thefamilypartnership.org (GLBT Links)

Gay Lesbian Community Services of Southeast Minnesota



Provides educational, informational, and social resources to the gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgender communities, their families, friends, and any interested persons.
Rochester, MN • www.glcsmn.org

Pride Collective & Community Center



Creates a sense of community and promotes education and social activities aimed at furthering the social, emotional, and physical well-being and development of the GLBT community in the Red River Valley. Moorhead, MN • www.pridecollective.com

RECLAIM



RECLAIM aims to increase access to mental health support so LGBT youth may reclaim their lives from oppression in all its forms. Minneapolis, MN • www.reclaim-lgbyouth.org



TEENAGE GAY
LOVE BECOMES
A

BEAUTIFUL THING

TO AN American ear, Thamesmead may sound like some hoity toity affair for posh Londoners. But in Jonathan Harvey's play *Beautiful Thing* it's a depressed housing project where two teenaged boys struggle with sexual identity and tune into the music of American Mama Cass to get them through the angst. Jonathan Harvey's gritty 1993 gem has drawn comparisons to the late Sheilagh Delaney's groundbreaking *A Taste of Honey*, which over three decades earlier dealt with youthful anguish and gay themes among Britain's poor working class. In 1996 *Beautiful Thing* was turned into an acclaimed indie film and in 2006 was revived in London to great reviews once again.

In Minneapolis, Theatre Latte Da presents its first local staging of Harvey's play at the Lab. It will include live vocals of Mama Cass songs sung by the beloved Erin Schwab. Peter Rothstein, Latte Da's Artistic Director, has been advising regarding the ➔



Ste (David Darrow) and Jamie (Steven Lee Johnson). Photo by George Byron Griffiths



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Ste (David Darrow) embraced by Jamie (Steven Lee Johnson). Photo by George Byron Griffiths

production's conceptualization but the actual director is Jeremy Cohen, the Producing Artistic Director for the Playwrights' Center. Cohen asked "what would happen if music were intentional and performed live, not necessarily by an actor playing Mama Cass, but that there was another energy, another voice, a storyteller of sorts that kind've

moved us from one place to the next? What would happen if we created scenically this world where she is between the scenes, sort of not seen by the characters, but wanders around in the midst of them - bringing the audience from one emotional or funny moment to another?"

Rothstein is struck by what he calls "the

juxtaposition of this realistic, urban drama and this iconic music. We (at Latte Da) are constantly searching for new and provocative ways for story and music to intersect."

Schwab has loved her research, since that has required lots of listening to Cass Elliot: "Lucky me. I have loved her spirit and her voice ever since I heard *Dream a* ➡➡

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THESE POORLY DEFINED LAWS ARE GLBT TEENS."

Little Dream of Me in high school. I think she has such an amazing ability to tell a story so honestly. You start to feel like she is speaking your thoughts and knows your feelings. I have always been amazed by the way music can speak for us when the words are difficult to say for ourselves."

Music Director Denise Prosek says that "Mama Cass's music both as a solo artist and as a part of the Mamas and the Papas, reflects an era of storytelling and invokes the power of an individual to instigate change. That is the message of *Beautiful Thing*. As a part of society, Ste and Jamie are immersed in discovering who they are, and how do they love each other as gay men? And how do their friends, neighbors, and parents accept their choices? By immersing themselves in Mama Cass and her messages of love and truth, the characters transform into their true selves as part of the world."

Indeed the Mamas and the Papas signify the essence of social change in a world stuck in negativity. In *Beautiful Thing* that negativity springs largely from the poverty and its subsequent ignorance and lack of opportunities. Cohen observes the "gritty sense of British naturalism. Jonathan Harvey wrote it as a sort of in your face work from the British theater movement that was happening at the time. The play, unlike the film, takes place primarily in a very public space and that's a real class thing. It's not like they're all in there drinking red wine and talking what if my kid was gay?"

Cohen also stresses how class differences stringently affect the very feasibility of coming out. It's one thing to live in a sophisticated urban area that reflects affluence and progressive attitudes. But, what if, he muses "you live in Mora, Minnesota or north Minneapolis or Harlem? Class fits into how people come out. Issues of masculinity really come through because

it's not just these kids and their families. It's also watching them in relationship with one another. It's why we're rooting for them to fall in love and get together. Ste starts in Act One saying 'look Jamie, if you only sort of butched up a bit nobody would pick on you.' There's very little for Jamie (Steven Johnson) and Ste (David Darrow) to grab onto, so they turn to each other."

Johnson sees *Beautiful Thing* as being "about first love for the boy next door and his schoolmate, Ste. Sort of a modern day Romeo and Juliet. Also, Jamie's relationship with his mother, Sandra (Jennifer Blagen) is loving but strained. She has to work all night at the pub to make ends meet and whenever she brings a new man into her life, it usually ends up being a pretty big disappointment for Jamie. He is starting to get to know Sandra's new flame, Tony (Dan Hopman) and his Mama Cass-loving neighbor and friend, Leah (Anna Sundberg). They watch rainbows while he's dodging gym class."

As for Ste, Darrow says "his struggle lies in getting through each day. He has an abusive family and is often beaten. The difficult home life makes him ambitious about one day having a job and moving away. But it also causes a lot of fear when he realizes he has feelings for another boy. In the second act, he says he is sure that his father would kill him if he ever found out about the relationship. He has to constantly struggle to find safety and understanding in unforgiving living conditions."

However, Jamie's living conditions present another sort of problem. Blagen shares "For Sandra, the core issue is not so much that her son is gay, but that she is losing her son Jamie, her best friend, to someone else. I think the relationship between Sandra and her son is especially close, and her concern for him before he comes out to her is that he's not fitting in,

that he might not be able to cope in the world. The world they live in is very tough and the system is not tilted in their favor, but Sandra has a fierce ambition and the ability to transcend her beginnings. She wants the same for her son."

Moreover, in Sandra's case, homophobia is actually *not* the issue: Blagen feels "when Jamie reveals his sexual leanings to her, she feels most betrayed that he has felt unable to share this with her, that she wasn't a sounding board. She is also hurt that he prefers the company of 16 year old Ste to her, even though she actually thinks highly of Ste because he is a thriver. I think ultimately she is even a bit relieved to learn that Jamie is gay because it means that his difficulties at school have a tangible cause, and do not arise from being broken in some way."

Playing a youth who has had such difficulties has heightened Johnson's awareness. He notes that "bullying and violence toward gay youth is a major theme in the play. Minnesota has some of the worst anti-bullying legislation in the country and a major group of people that suffer from these poorly defined laws are GLBT teens."

Johnson adds "falling in love is an awkward and sexy and scary and confusing and exciting and I think *Beautiful Thing* captures all of those elements and not just the romantic cliché ones. I love that even though the play is set in '90s London, there is just something so universal about falling in love for the first time, that I think anyone -regardless of sexual identity- will be able to see themselves in the characters." □

Beautiful Thing

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Executive Chef Robert Wohlfeil (left); King Crab Legs served at the raw bar (right); Mahi Mahi (opposite). Photos by Hubert Bonnet

Oceanaire

The bar inside the new incarnation of The Oceanaire Seafood Room is packed. The room swirls with neon blue reflecting off mirrored chandeliers. The room as described by the General Manager, Jake Uttich is going for a “1940’s meets 1970’s meets the future” style. He’s not wrong; a sharkskin suit wouldn’t look the least bit out place in this room. My table-mate Jason Matheson (co-host of Fox 9’s Morning Buzz and half of the Jason & Alexis

The bar inside the new incarnation of The Oceanaire Seafood Room is

show on My Talk 107.1) quips, “It looks like every episode of the Love Boat that featured Charo.” While the hostess might bear a passing resemblance to cruise director, Julie, we are most definitely ensconced in the heart of downtown Minneapolis.

The exodus of elegance from the old Hyatt is complete, as Oceanaire has moved on to these shinier new digs. The room is completely different; bright, wide open, and right next to the street. Another change is the head toque. The kitchen was lead by Uttich until he made the leap to the front of house. Now installed ➔



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Crab Cakes (left) and a Seafood Room (right).

behind the burners is Robert Wohlfeil.

Wohlfeil grew up in North Dakota, where home dinners included healthy fare, a switch his family made for the sake of his father's health. He still fondly remembers the first dish he learned to cook was split pea soup, from scratch, with his mother. He described their usual split pea as coming from the can, but one day she pulled out all the works, dried peas, ham bone. He remembered standing by her side, watching and taking it all in. There in that moment, there was a quiet flicker, the beginning of a curiosity of how food could go from one state and morph into something entirely new.

His first culinary job was as a

dishwasher at a North Dakotan diner called Kroll's. They would occasionally let him near the food. From there he went to Famous Dave's, a dubious beginning for a fine dining chef, but it was there that he met another cook, who had just graduated culinary school and opened his eyes to technique. The flicker burst into flame and he packed off for Minneapolis, where he attended the Art Institute's Culinary program. It was while he was in school and working three other jobs, he began his career at Oceanaire.

He hasn't worked anywhere else. That's one of the things I found when speaking with both past and present employees of Oceanaire. It's a rare restaurant company



that is so dedicated to promoting from within and growing careers. They cultivate and retain their talent and it's evident from talking with everyone involved in the company that they also have a lot of fun. That passion for their business also drives their quality.

When the Minnesota Zoo's Fish Smart sustainable seafood initiative began, Oceanaire was the first to join. For example, they list on their menu that the grouper is line-caught, the only way to sustainably catch the fish. That the fish is flown in fresh each day isn't enough; Oceanaire knows the people who do the actual catching, down to the employees and the boat. A couple →

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of years ago all of the king crab they served was caught by the Time Bandit, a boat fans of the Discovery Channel show "Deadliest Catch" will recognize. It's always nice to be able to enjoy a meal with a side of ethics.

While all the ethics and the cosmetics are nice, there is the matter of actual taste. The food is just as exquisite, elegant and opulent as ever. An order of crab cakes arrives packed with giant hunks of crab meat, barely clinging together with just a hint of breading, served with a creamy, rich, cloud-colored mayo spiked with nasal-clearing mustard. The mahi-mahi topped with the "dynamite" enhancement was so astounding that I wanted to bury my head in the entire dish and not come up for air until after springtime. Each succulent, thumb sized hunk of perfectly cooked fish leapt from fork to mouth. The Dynamite preparation is a topping for more ginormo-hunks of crab and broiled for just a moment. The entire seafood mountain is served over a delicate butter sauce spiked with just a whisper of heat from Thai chilies.

For value-conscious diners, Oceanaire is no longer only for power diners and special occasions; they recently began serving lunch, another perk in the bustling location. On the day of our visit, they were still training, but men in expertly tailored suits were dining, shaking hands, and likely making some big and powerful business decisions. A delicious, high-quality seafood lunch is not something many cube-dwellers have had the opportunity to experience in downtown Minneapolis.

An even more astounding value is the happy hour, which runs every week day from 5-7pm. Food specials include mini crab cakes for \$8 and the raw bar in addition to expertly poured martinis and selections from the raw bar. Cleanly shucked oysters are as bright and briny as a Cape Cod morning; a trio is only \$6 at happy hour. Classic cocktails, like a perfectly mixed Sidecar, are only \$5, select beer is a rock bottom \$3, and select wines are \$4. It's already becoming one of the hottest after work tickets around. With all the changes, including the Jetson-fueled decor, it's nice to find that what has stayed the same is their commitment to being the very best in seafood and destination dining.

The Oceanaire Seafood Room: 50 South Sixth Street, Minneapolis, MN, www.theoceanaire.com, 612-333-2277. □

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My Mother's Lesbian Jewish Wiccan Wedding. Photo by Sarah Whiting

➔ **My Mother's Lesbian Jewish Wiccan Wedding** — You know we've come a long way baby when acclaimed, sympathetic, gay-themed stage work generated by straight folks and creates a buzz. It was a Toronto straight married couple actually, that conceived one of that city's big Fringe Festival musical hits of 2009, which has also played New York. David Hein and Irene Carl Sankoff tell the true story of David's mother's coming out and being in love.

True to form, Minnesota Jewish Theatre continues to manifest artistic courage and exploration of challenging themes under Barbara Brooks's Artistic Directorship, while entertaining at a standard comparable to other topnotch Twin Cities professional houses.

Brooks, central to the play's selection, observes "the story looks at Claire (Laura B. Adams) who is on a journey to a stronger identity. For her it included identity as a Jew as well as a lesbian. A concern in the Jewish community today, as well as in other cultural/ethnic/religious communities, is lack of identity and engagement

with the community, so developing a stronger identity is not only most relevant to Jewish culture today, but it's universal to a large extent. It also looks at the timely issues of the changing American family – two parents of the same sex and same sex marriage." In Canada same-sex marriage is legal.

Also speaking to identity, director Michael Kissin points out "that a conventional upbringing and marriage with children in Lincoln, Nebraska, and approval from a strong-willed mother simply are not satisfying. So the struggle is to leave that behind, that security. Claire foregoes everything known: hometown, husband, son, mother – abandons her security in favor of the elusive quest for a new identity, which, of course, in the play, she achieves. And we bear witness to the struggle and the transformation."

Adams, who had us rolling in the aisles in 2010 as the lead in the often lesbi-erotic *Michele! The Bachumantary Musical*, says "we first meet her in the play as she is leaving and saying goodbye to her teenage son, David (Matt Rein), who will stay in Nebraska with her ex-husband. Claire has always been attracted to women but never acted on it. She finds herself away from her mother, who is an orthodox Jew. And in an openly gay community in Ottawa she allows herself to finally feel the feelings she has always had. She meets Jane (Tinia Moulder) and falls in love with her."

For those who wonder about the effect this has on the son, you can put your mind at ease. Kissin observes "we know from the beginning that all will be well, because David, the son (played by David Hein in the New York production), now roughly 30 years old, walks in with his guitar, and begins narrating and singing the story, recollected in tranquility, ie. he is a happy, well-adjusted, witty, charming, amusing, handsome, hetero adult."

Rein adds, "David is incredibly open to his mother's coming out. He wakes up in bed one night and realizes 'Oh! My mom's a lesbian.' Before she comes out to him, he has the realization on his own, so the actual moment of coming out focuses more on the mother's desire to know how David feels about it rather than how David feels about it."

As for Wiccan love interest Jane, Kissin sees her as representing "what Claire seeks: beauty, self-knowledge, love, physical attraction and true partnership." Music Director Kevin Dutcher says of the music and lyrics "it's evident that the words came first. This is a story and the guy who wrote it, lived it." The ex-husband, Garth (David Coral) sings:

Was it me – did I turn her off men?
Was it her – was she always pretending
That we -we were better off friends?
Now I'm sure- we were better off ending
And she – I'm sure that she's dealing
And I – I don't know how I'm feeling now.

Feb. 18 – Mar. 11 • Hillcrest Center, 1978 Ford Pkwy, St. Paul • (651) 647- 4315
www.mnjewishtheatre.org

An Ideal Husband — The trial of Oscar Wilde looms in gay history on a par with Hitler's Night of the Long Knives and Stonewall. For those of you who think your great grandparents or great great grandparents may not have known about gayness, consider that Wilde's trial for 'gross indecency' reverberated around the world in the late 1890s and given that his plays have been continually popular ever since his impoverished death in Paris in 1900 at age 46, odds are those folks from that time we so often sentimentalize about, may have actually been more aware of gay folk and oppression than we might think. Director Amy Rummenie thinks the 1895 comedy "contains shades of Wilde's life divided between his characters: Lord Goring (David Beukema), the 'flawless dandy' fond of being misunderstood; Sir Robert (Adam Whisner), a man of honor facing the repercussions of a crime done in his youth; and even his wife Gertrude (Sarah Ochs), inflexibly holding her husband to standards he has already failed to achieve. The blackmail plot that surrounds Sir Robert has unfortunate similarities to the one that eventually consumed Wilde's career and life. Just over a month after opening night, a few enterprising blackmailers surfaced with some incriminating letters of Wilde." That said, Rummenie calls Lord Goring "the moral center of the play. Unflappably calm, unerringly insightful, dapper, and witty, he is an echo of the public face of Wilde – the kind of man who seems to glide through trouble and emerge on the other side with a sassy epigram and not a hair out of place." Beukema wonders that some might "think that Goring is a substitute for Wilde himself – the always witty, seemingly lighthearted life of the party who has much more lying beneath the surface." **Through Feb. 25 • Red Eye Theater, 15 W. 14th St., Mpls. • (612) 375-0300 • www.walkingshadowcompany.org**



An Ideal Husband.
Art by Alphonse Mucha's painting "Flirt"



Ballad of the Pale Fisherman. Photo by Avey Alexandres

Ballad of the Pale Fisherman — If you missed this dreamy little gem of a show at the 2010 Minnesota Fringe Fest you've lucked out because it's being reprised and expanded! Directed by Isabel Nelson, this folktale about a fisherman (Diogo Lopes) who falls in love with and marries a seal woman aka a 'selkie' (Anna Reichert), exudes splendidly lyrical stage movement and transformational performances.

Allison Witham who is part of the show's inventively magical ensemble, plays several different characters including a bartender, an elderly woman named Maud, a very friendly seal, the ocean, one half of a boat, a young mother, and a squeaky bed. She says "part of the challenge of devising and performing the piece is that we choose to perform without set or props, except an accordion which Derek Miller plays. This forces us to create and inhabit the world of the seaside fishing town with only our bodies." **Through Feb. 25 • Illusion Theater, 528 Hennepin Av., Mpls. • (612) 339-4944 • www.illusiontheater.org**

Black Label Movement's Visceral at the Cowles — For the past five years choreographer Carl Flink has shaped his Black Label Movement troupe into a highly physical company that gets raves. Their first run at the prestigious Cowles Center will surely expand their base. Flink is a demanding creative genius who can actually have dancers give you the sense of what it was like to drown in the Edmund Fitzgerald and his work on movement for plays, like *Mary's Wedding* at the Jungle, can lyrically render physical human emotions themselves. One of Visceral's segments is based on Jonathan Swift's radical satire, *A Modest Proposal*.

Flink says, "we are fascinated with exploring the risks the human body can take in dance and movement - to celebrate the body as much for its power and athleticism as its potential for grace. Some think dancers should glow, but I think BLM movers should sweat." **Feb. 10-12 • Cowles Center for Dance and the Performing Arts, 528 Hennepin Av., Mpls. • (612) 206-3600 • www.thecowlescenter.org**



Soul Tight Committee. Photo Courtesy of Soul Tight Committee

Soul Tight Committee — You can have the Beatles. I'm just a bit younger so my era was the Soul Era of the late '60s and '70s and I have never ever thought it got its due. It's one of the most important movements in American cultural history and made the general population fall in love with African American music to an extent it never had before and perhaps since. The tunes of the time require superb vocals and clear connection with emotion, and you can bet this 10 piece ensemble will spirit us back to that dreamy space in time.

Soul Tight Committee, a nominee of many Minnesota Music Awards, will perform such classics as *Ain't No Woman* (The Four Tops), *Boogie Wonderland* (Earth, Wind, and Fire), *At Last* (Etta James), *I Wish* (Stevie Wonder), and *I'll Be Around* (The Spinners), as well as tunes made popular by Patti LaBelle, The Emotions, Michael Jackson, and K.C. & The Sunshine Band. **Fri., Feb. 17 • Chanhassen Dinner Theatres Club Stage, 501 West 78th Street, Chanhassen (952) 934-1540 • www.ChanhassenDT.com**

Story/Time — Bill T. Jones looms as one of the planet's great choreographers. His current Walker commission includes his globally renowned dancers with their physical magnificence and divine sense of experimentation. It also salutes two experimental gay artists who were life partners for about half a century: composer John Cage (1912-92) and choreographer Merce Cunningham (1919-2009).

Walker Performing Arts Curator Philip Bither reflects "since the earliest part of his career in the 1970s, Bill T. Jones has always been openly, proudly gay in a way few in the highest levels of American performing arts world had been before him. He was and continues to be a model of how to be a forceful, proud and very public gay man -one who has exercised the right to love whoever he wanted and celebrate those relationships openly for the world to see. He has spoken regularly and bravely about his HIV-positive status, his loving relationship with Arnie Zane -both his personal and artistic partner until Zane's death from AIDS in 1988- and about the need to fight homophobia and racism that persists in our culture. He has for more than three decades fought these battles both on and off stage. That is why, in part, it was so thrilling to see him last year be given on national television a Kennedy Center Award by President Obama, the highest cultural recognition in the land. It felt like, for a moment, we were in fact, making progress as a people - progress due in no small part to the efforts of artists and activists like Bill T. Jones." **Feb. 16-19 • Walker Art Center, 1750 Hennepin Av., Mpls. • (612) 375-7600 • www.walkerart.org**

Harold and The Purple Crayon — For decades there's been a steady debate -as there should be- about the use, overuse, and misuse of technology and special effects in live theater. It's a legitimate concern because tech can overpower performances of plays where the human form and the power of language itself and human movement can and in some cases, ought to, take us back to the most elemental aspects of performance.

However, the Seattle Children's Theatre, now hosted by the Minneapolis Children's Theatre, gives us a superb example of a work that balances technological brilliance with performance brilliance. Crockett Johnson's 1955 children's fiction classic has been adapted for stage with a dream-like stream of consciousness concept where pajama-clad Harold (an endearing Don Daryll Rivera) draws lines with his purple crayon wherever his impulses take him. And while he does, he automatically creates new worlds and being: spaceships, fish, and dragons reminiscent of a minimalist Chinese New Year.

The messages within this could be legion but clearly it spirits forth how our thoughts create our reality. A great message, don't you think? (Rivera has also written the text adaptation.) Director Rita Giomi sees the stage as her canvas and on it she takes us beneath the sea and into outer space. She balances the craft of her actors, who also include the nimble and charming Khanh Doan and Caety Sagoian, with captivating visuals by animator Stefan Gruben and lighting designer L.B. Morse. Auston James's music and Rob Burgess's lyrics enhance the show's gentle power. **Through Feb. 26 • Children's Theatre Company, 2400 Third Av., S., Mpls. • (612) 874-0400 • www.childrenstheatre.org**



Harold and the Purple Crayon. Photo by Dan Norman



→ **HOWLER** *Give Up America*

Jordan Gatesmith was a teenager when he founded Howler in 2010, but the band's sound on their debut album showcases a confidence that goes far beyond their years. The Minneapolis-based five-piece has a great international buzz right now, and they bring the goods through their noisy debut. Howler isn't recreating the wheel here. This is straight-up modern rock 'n' roll in the Strokes mode, but played with plenty more verve (and distortion) than that group. The band brings out other influences along the way, such as the terrific "Too Much Blood," which sounds like a lost Jesus and Mary Chain track. While "I Told You Once" and "Back of the Neck" are perfect tracks for a radio station actually willing to rock.



HIGH DIVE *High Dive*

Punk rock and queer culture have long been intertwined. Punk was a very visible way to showcase that you were different and – in some corners of the scene at least – being gay was not just accepted, but celebrated. There's still a need for positive queercore, and this new trio – featuring members of acoustic punkers Defiance, Ohio – fits the bill. This sharp and short (about 23 minutes) debut focuses on breezy-sounding high-energy rock 'n' roll, but also sports personal, honest tales of relationships, life, and being gay. That comes out in plenty of the tracks, but especially on standouts "Tennessee" and "Thank You," both of which provide strong lyrical comfort and support for all the people who struggle with themselves, and society's perception of their sexuality.



POLICA *Give You the Ghost*

In the wake of Roma di Luna's breakup, Channy Moon Casselle's new project has earned plenty of ink, but the band is far from just the new chapter for the singer. Polica features an all-star cast, fronted by Gayngs' Ryan Olson and players from the Vampire Hands and Stnnng. The vibe is close to Gayngs as well, with plenty of moody-if-somewhat-funky beats, washes of keyboards and a brooding vibe that sounds drawn from a late-night crawl down the seedy streets of Minneapolis. Sometimes, the vibe gets a bit too overwhelming, and the songs start to blend together, but more often than not it makes for thrilling listening, such as on "Lay Your Cards Out" or "Violent Games." Polica is definitely a band to watch.



GUIDED BY VOICES *Let's Go Eat the Factory*

When preparing for this piece, I checked my iTunes library and saw that I had more than 800 Guided by Voices tracks. So what do Robert Pollard and company give us this time? Pretty much exactly what we've always gotten: A messy collection of oft-brilliant classic, fuzzy, low-fi pop (in the 1960s sense) interspersed with dashed-off concepts, short experiments and whatever else the mad genius had in mind that day. The presence of the classic mid-'90s band lineup makes for a tougher, more lively sound than Pollard brought to his recent solo albums, and when the album hits – "The Unsinkable Fats Domino" or "Spiderfighter" or closer "We Won't Apologize for the Human Race" – it hits as well as anything from their long, boozy history. □

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**"IT WILL BE TALKED ABOUT
FOR YEARS TO COME"**
- DAILY TELEGRAPH

**END
OF THE
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EricJames Borges. Photo via Facebook

A Letter to EricJames Borges

DEAR ERICJAMES,

I didn't know you, but I wish I would have been able to. I wish I could have given you hope by telling you what we have in common, how things worked out for me, how things could work out for you too.

You were a nineteen-year-old filmmaker. You were an intern with The Trevor Project, the nationally known GLBTQ youth suicide prevention hotline. On December 10, 2011, you posted an "It Gets Better" video in which you told a heartbreaking tale of being raised in an "extremist Christian" household. You spoke of being bullied from kindergarten through high school as well as at home. You told how your mother had performed an exorcism in an attempt to "cure" you.

A month later, you killed yourself.

Hearing your story brought me up short, because I, too, have been the subject of an exorcism. When I was nineteen, my mother discovered I was gay. She started fasting and praying that I would be cured. One evening she and her Christian fundamentalist friends held an exorcism in absentia in her living

room to cast the demon of homosexuality out of me. (The exorcism was unsuccessful.)

My mother started writing a book which she thought would be about how her son had been prayed straight. But she later wrote: "As I watched him living his life, I was the one who began to change my ideas." As it turned out, her book was subtitled "A mother struggles to accept her gay son and discovers herself." That book, by Mary Borhek, was *My Son Eric*, and for many years she spoke out as an activist for GLBT rights. (Since my mother wanted to use pseudonyms in the book, I chose "Eric" for mine. So we also share a first name, sort of.)

I was very lucky—I was blessed with other supportive people who helped me deal with my mother's initial reaction to my gayness. But as an intern at The Trevor Project, you certainly had supportive people around you too. Tragically, their support and love evidently was not able to overcome the years of painful bullying and other assaults you endured.

I cringe at some of the hateful things I

hear about GLBTQ people from the mouths of supposed Christians. The words hurt. They wound. Sometimes they kill. They are the opposite of Christian love and charity. They are not the gospel that Jesus came to offer us.

How many more of our young people will have to be sacrificed on the altars of, in your words, "extremist Christian" hate before we as a society say, "No more"? I hope not too many. I would prefer none.

EricJames, wherever you are, I hope you are at peace and I hope you can forgive your tormentors. Truly, they knew not what they were doing.

Sincerely and sorrowfully,
"Eric Borhek" (a/k/a Steve Lenius,
a/k/a Your Humble Columnist)

P.S. You made a short film titled "Invisible Creatures" that showed such potential. The lighting, camerawork and composition were beautiful. I'm so sorry you won't have a chance to make any more films. I would have wanted to see them. ■



BIGGAYNEWS.COM: YOUR DAILY PODCAST OF GLBT WORLD NEWS!



Forced Sterilization for Transgender People in Sweden

Mother Jones reports that Sweden is considering legislation that would allow transgender individuals to marry, but would force them to undergo reproductive sterilization. The current law, passed in 1972 requires both divorce and sterilization.

Susan Allen Makes History

Minneapolis attorney Susan Allen made U.S. history in January becoming the first openly gay Native American woman to be elected to a state legislature. Allen, a Democrat, won 55% percent of the vote in a special election for District 61B, which includes a portion of south Minneapolis. She replaces Democrat Jeffrey Hayden who was elected to the Minnesota Senate. She is also the only Native American currently serving in the legislature. During her campaign, Allen touted her own personal diversity as an asset for the community she wanted to represent at the Capitol. "I reflect the great diversity of our district, as a Native American woman and a member of the LGBT community, and hope to bring this important voice to the state capital to offer more balanced, representative contributions and input." Representative Allen has lived in south Minneapolis for just about the last 15 years. "It reminds me of a lot of the places I grew up. It's 62 percent minority," she told Minnesota Public Radio. She told reporters her goals as a newly-elected legislator are to create jobs and help close the academic achievement gap. She also said she hopes to help defeat the state constitutional amendment that would ban same-sex marriage and "...turn out voters

against writing discrimination into our state constitution." Allen will be up for re-election with the rest of House members in the fall.

UK Muslims Convicted in Landmark Gay Hatred Case

Reuters reports that three British Muslim men were found guilty in January of anti-gay rhetoric by distributing leaflets calling for the death of homosexuals. The men handed the leaflets out in advance of a gay pride parade in Derby, England.

South African Rights Investigators Probe Zulu King's Alleged Gay Slur

The Washington Post reports that South Africa's human rights agency said that it is investigating allegations that the Zulu King called gay people "rotten" during a speech. In a statement, the Zulu royal household said the king's comments were mistranslated. King Zwelithini has no governing powers in South Africa, but is an influential figure.

Cynthia Nixon Says Being Gay 'Is A Choice'

Actress Cynthia Nixon created controversy in a recent speech and interview claiming she chose to be gay. During a recent speech in connection with an upcoming Broadway play, Nixon said, "I've been straight and I've been gay, and gay is bet-

ter." When asked to clarify, Nixon defended her statement saying, "...for me, it is a choice. I understand that for many people it's not, but for me it's a choice, and you don't get to define my gayness for me."

Gay Marriage Bill Advances in NJ, Despite Veto Threat

The Wall Street Journal reports that New Jersey's state legislature advanced gay marriage legislation in January, despite a threatened veto by Republican governor Chris Christie. According to the Wall Street Journal, New Jersey Democrats might be close to having a veto-proof majority. In January, a poll from Quinnipiac University found 52% support for gay marriage among New Jersey voters, the first time approval has been above 50%.

Gay Groups Angry Kansas Anti-Sodomy Law Remains on Books

Reuters reports that gay rights groups in Kansas are upset over a state sodomy law still on the books, even after the Supreme Court ruled in 2003 that such laws are unconstitutional. Thomas Witt, chairman of the Kansas Equality Coalition, a state gay rights group says, "We are angry that the governor of a state wants to keep a statute on the books that says gay people deserve to go to jail."

Ugandan Gay Activists Honor Slain Rights Leader

AFP reports that gay activists in Uganda met to commemorate the first anniversary of the murder of fellow activist David Kato. Kato was found beaten to death outside his home in Kampala last January. Kato's mother told reporters, "It is not easy when a loved one dies but thanks to all the friends inside and outside Uganda who worked with David... when I get down they lift me up and help me."

Starbucks Endorses Gay Marriage in Washington State

Reuters reports that Starbucks made a statement in January, publicly supporting gay marriage legislation in Washington state. "Starbucks strives to create a company culture that puts our partners first, and our company has a lengthy history of leading and supporting policies that promote equality and inclusion." Starbucks joins Microsoft and other major corporations to support the legislation.

Maine Poised for 2nd Public Vote on Gay Marriage

The Associated Press reports that gay marriage supporters in Maine are planning to put the issue before voters once more in 2012. A statewide vote in 2009 resulted in the repeal of marriage legislation passed by the legislature. Betsy Smith, executive director of Equality Maine, said polling by gay marriage supporters indicates 54 percent of state residents now support gay marriage.

NAACP Supports Extending Rights to Maryland Transgender Residents

The Washington Post reports that NAACP President Benjamin Jealous said in January that the organization supports legislation in Maryland that would extend civil rights protections to transgender residents. Jealous made the announcement at the 24th national conference on GLBT equality.

New Hampshire Bill Would Allow Service Refusal To Gay Couples

WCVB-TV reports that the New Hampshire legislature is considering a bill that would allow providers of wedding-related goods or services to refuse doing business with gay couples, if doing so would violate their conscience or religious beliefs. The bill would also bar lawsuits against business owners who deny business to gay couples. The state's House Judiciary committee held a hearing in January on the bill. If the committee recommends the legislation, it will head to the full house for a vote. ■

Against the Amendment: An Interview with Ann Kaner-Roth

ANN KANER-ROTH was appointed executive director at Project 515 in 2010. Prior to 2010, she served as executive director of Child Care WORKS; associate director of the Jewish Community Foundation; and Field Representative for the California State Assembly. She holds an MSW focused in public policy from Boston University and a B.A. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Lavender Magazine: Tell me about Project 515.

Ann Kaner-Roth: Project 515 is a Minnesota-based nonprofit working to ensure that same-sex couples and their families have equal rights and considerations under Minnesota law. There are at least 515 Minnesota state laws that discriminate against same-sex couples and their families. We work toward our mission by educating Minnesotans about that discrimination, sharing stories of impacted families, and pursuing pro-equality legislation.

LM: What legislation have you pursued?

AKR: In 2009 we passed the *Protecting One's Home* bill, which provided equity to unmarried co-homeowners. That bill was signed into law, but our *Final Wishes* and *Wrongful Death* bills were vetoed by Governor Pawlenty in 2010. We've worked for the passage of other bills focusing on policy issues that improve laws for same-sex couples, including probate, judiciary, health care, end-of-life issues and more.

LM: What was your legislative focus in 2011 and what will you work on in 2012?

AKR: In 2011, we poured all of our legislative resources into working to defeat efforts to place a constitutional amendment on the 2012 ballot, directing our four registered lobbyists (including me) to do whatever possible to avoid a ballot measure. Despite a passionate debate from both sides of the aisle, and a strong collaboration between many organizations to fight this off, the Minnesota Legislature voted to place the amendment banning marriage for same-sex



Ann Kaner-Roth. Photo by Gia Vitali

couples on the 2012 ballot.

The 2012 legislative session is expected to be brief, and all eyes are on the November 6, 2012 election. Our efforts this year are focused on defeating the ballot measure.

LM: What is your position on the constitutional amendment?

AKR: Project 515, along with OutFront Minnesota, is one of two founding organizations of MN United for All Families. We publicly and strongly oppose the amendment. There are more than 10,000 Minnesota families headed by committed same-sex partners who are raising children, making health decisions about family members, buying homes together and doing all the things that make for safe, happy and productive families. The constitutional amendment would place these families at risk by permanently placing discrimination in our state constitution.

LM: Why is this discussion important for Minnesota?

AKR: Minnesotans value fairness. Project 515's statewide polls have shown that nearly 8 out of 10 Minnesotans believe gays and lesbians should be treated no differently under the law.

However, there is a significant gap between the fairness Minnesotans value and

Minnesota's laws. At a time when Minnesota is concerned about education, the economy, health care and other important quality of life issues, it's unfortunate that Minnesotans will spend the next year debating a constitutional amendment that hurts many families without helping even one family.

LM: Can't same-sex or unmarried couples just hire an attorney and draw up legal documents to secure the rights and responsibilities that married couples have?

AKR: Even if couples are able to afford the significant expense of obtaining legal counsel, most of the rights, benefits and responsibilities automatically provided to married couples cannot be replicated by signing legal documents or contracts.

LM: Families headed by same-sex couples already exist in Minnesota. How many are there and would the amendment deny legal rights to those families?

AKR: According to the 2010 U.S. Census, there are more than 10,000 gay and lesbian couples living in Minnesota who cannot receive the same recognition or protections for their families as other couples. Almost 20% of those families are raising children. If passed, the constitutional amendment keeps those families at risk by permanently placing discrimination in our state constitution and places significant roadblocks in the path toward equal treatment for same-sex couples and their families.

LM: Why is access to marriage more important than access to a civil union with the same rights?

AKR: Project 515 is focused on achieving equality under the law for same-sex couples in whatever way best provides the same rights, benefits, and responsibilities that are bestowed to straight couples by marriage. Without the freedom to legally marry, same-sex couples do not receive the same recognition and protections for their families as other couples. □



Polishing Your Skills

PREPARE FOR SPRING WITH A MIDWINTER COOKING CLASS

WINTER'S COLD dark nights can leave us feeling as if we're locked in and hibernating. If your post-holiday, pre-spring entertaining schedule is lagging and you haven't yet found that perfect caterer, it's a great time to brush up your cooking skills. Knowing how to hold a knife and boil an egg are basics that make preparing meals and entertaining a snap. Even a well-trained housekeeper usually needs a hand in the kitchen to make your party go smoothly.

The Twin Cities offers a wide range of ways to get your culinary techniques in order. Trial and error is the beast that whips a novice cook into a kitchen wizard. How many times did you scramble eggs before making the perfect béarnaise?

By far the easiest way to learn is to find a friend; the person in our lives (mothers are good candidates) who seem to breeze through, no matter the task. Not only is learning from a friend fun, it offers a different kind of entertaining opportunity—preparing and sharing a meal together. If you remember a great dish your friend prepared in the past, why not give them a call and see if they can show you how to make that same magic happen.

If there are not any neighborly chefs to lend a hand, turn to your local kitchen supply store. Between Cooks of Crocus Hill in Saint Paul and Kitchen Window in Minneapolis, there are plenty of classes to choose from. From basic knife handling, to the flavors of Latin America, these informative classes are a great way to polish your skills (and maybe meet a dinner date!). Classes also give you the chance to learn from real experts and, often, award-winning local culinary notables. Upcoming instruction ranges from preparing a romantic meal, outdoor grilling, sushi-making, to decadent truffles and vegan cuisine. The culinary store also has the benefit of oodles of kitchen gadgets that you get to try your hand with. Even if you can't afford that three thousand dollar grill, you can play on one for a few hours.

Culinary lessons can also be found at locations such as the Kitchen in the Market



Cooks of Crocus Hill. Photo Courtesy of Cooks of Crocus Hill

at Midtown, several Byerly's locations and Whole Foods on Lake Street. The benefit to taking instruction at these locations is all the fresh ingredients that are available at your fingertips. Byerly's has one more advantage; the fifteen dollar cost of their classes is partly reimbursed with a \$10 gift card to use in store after the class. The natural food coops also come highly recommended. The new Seward Coop on Franklin Avenue in Minneapolis and the two Mississippi Market locations in St. Paul offer a wide variety of classes, from simple cooking instruction to healthy eating and shopping on a budget. Some classes are even offered for free to the public.

We all need excuses to avoid the cold; executing a meal with newly found culinary skills just might be the way to leave this winter inspired. Gain some education and confidence in the kitchen from your local gastronomic resources. We hope to see you there!

To find out more information about cooking classes and demonstrations, phone or visit the websites of these notable shops:

Kitchen Window

Mpls- 612-824-4417
www.kitchenwindow.com

Cooks of Crocus Hill

St. Paul 651-228-1333/ Edina 952-285-1903
www.cooksofcrocushill.com

Byerly's

St. Louis Park- 952-253-3409
www.lundsandbyerlys.com

Kitchen in the Market

Midtown Mpls-612-568-5486
www.kitcheninthemarket.com


Whole Foods

Mpls-612-927-8141
www.wholefoodsmarket.com

Seward Co-op

Mpls-612-338-2465
www.seward.coop

Mississippi Market

Selby St. Paul-651-310-9499
 W. 7th St. Paul- 651-690-0507
www.msmarket.coop 



My Days Among the Super Rich, Part I

When American Airlines declared bankruptcy in late 2011, I decided to cash in all my air miles and “treat myself.” I’m well aware that this statement makes it seem that “treating myself” is a relatively rare occurrence. But, the happy fact is that I treat myself every day. That’s the nice thing about not having children: you are free to spend your pennies as selfishly and foolishly as you like.

But these weren’t pennies. These were air miles and I had mountains of them, because I’m somewhat of a financial idiot and had no idea that they could be used for something other than upgrades on overseas flights. They’re actually like money and can be used to purchase completely unnecessary stuff, which is my favorite kind of stuff.

So, I looked at the list of stuff I could exchange for miles and decided on the most ridiculous and expensive item on the list: a three-night stay at the Carlyle Hotel in New York City.

Here’s a quick tutorial on the Carlyle, in case you are unfamiliar with this country’s luxurious adultery grounds. The hotel is on the Upper East Side, aka Wasp Central, and is the place where JFK used to schtup starlets. He actually used a secret tunnel to the hotel to keep his assignations out of the media. The hotel is ghastly expensive and far removed from the garishness of Time’s Square. It’s also home to the famous Café Carlyle, one of the coziest and costliest cabarets in the world.

I’ve always wanted to stay there because, in spite of the fact that I’m a socialist in the Scandinavian sense of the word and, thus, prone to standing on bar stools and proclaiming “power to the people” when tipsy, I love luxury hotels. I love well-stocked mini-bars, plush robes, and fancy soaps. I don’t think there’s anything in the Socialist handbook that says you can’t pamper yourself occasionally.

When I told my girlfriend that we were staying at the Carlyle, she looked stricken. “They won’t like it,” she said with real fear in her eyes. By “they” she was referring to the super wealthy, that odd species of human that doesn’t need to use air miles to pay for its hotel stays.

My girlfriend owns a company that services the very rich, so she’s quite familiar with their bizarre rituals and habitats. She talks about the rich in the same awed, head-shaking fashion that we normal mammals speak of weird mammals, like the platypus. Platypuses are mammals, but they lay eggs and they don’t have nipples like the rest of us mammals. Because they have no nipples, their milk just sort of leaks out of their chests and their egg-babies have to lick it off them. They’re odd, fascinating, and kind of gross, just like the super rich.

I’m not rich, but I make a comfortable living and I own a hot tub, which makes most of my friends pea green with envy. If I ever did get

wealthy, I’d live much the same as I do now, except I’d probably keep some exotic animals as pets. Yes, that’s the type of rich person I’d be: the one with perpetually messed up hair that walks a lobster on a leash through the public square. I’d also drink a lot more champagne. And, maybe, get a butler.

“Oh, don’t be silly,” I told my girlfriend, as I slipped into an old sweater and ratty jeans and zipped up my travel duffle bag. “We fit in everywhere. The rich will think we’re one of them.”

Stay tuned for the next episode, when I report back from the front lines of the super rich and fill you in on what the Wall Street protestors can learn about punishing the wealthy from the waiters, hotel staff and store clerks who service them. ■

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MAD Malaise

“NO WAY do you look fifty-five,” someone said the other day. For a second, I felt wonderful. Then I remembered: I really am fifty-five.

I agree that I don’t look my age. Nor, for that matter, do I act it. Maybe, as I’ve heard, fifty is the new forty. Regardless, there’s one thing I can’t escape: I’m hitting another Valentine’s day trying to date when many people my age are partnered or married or just plain disinterested.

Throw in that I’m transgender, and all of a sudden, it’s an uphill battle to score a date with a decent woman.

For sure, I’ve had my share of dating partners. However, things never quite work out for the long haul. Four months seems to be the magic number—everything sails along reasonably well to that point, and then, inexplicably, the relationship goes to hell in an instant. I’m pretty sure—no, on second thought, make that absolutely positive—this abysmal track record has nothing to do with me.

“It’s just bad luck,” I tell myself.

In my rare moments of lucidity, I’ve tried to analyze why it is that Match.com has the same people showing up in the same photographs with the same profiles day in and day out. Does everyone have \$59.95 to throw around for three months of hoping? I, for one, am tired of waiting for that special “match” to show up in my life. I can’t be the only one who thinks like this.

I’m certain there are plenty of lesbians and bisexual women searching for Ms. Right, just like me. We simply don’t know where to look. As best I can tell, there’s no coffee shop or bar that caters specifically to lesbians. Pi the bar is long dead. I belong to a wonderful Meet Up group, but many of the women in it are already taken.

It doesn’t help that I’m picky. My perfect woman has Jennifer Aniston’s body, Zooey Deschanel’s looks, and Lady Gaga’s personality. There’s bonus points for Rachel Maddow’s spunk. My perfect woman has to love bicycling and the Sunday New York Times, read appropriately in bed. It would help if she’s Mensa level smart, but I’ll accept slightly less intellect if she meets all other qualifications. I realize I have to be flexible to some extent.

Oh, wait a minute. Come back to reality, Ellie.

I’m not the only one in a middle aged dating (“MAD”) malaise. My baby brother—sadly, another fifty something—has a hard time snagging that all-important second or third date with the right person. “It’s frustrating as hell,” he said.

Tell me about it. At least my bro’s getting first dates. That means he’s got far less to complain about.

I don’t know what role being transgender plays in my dating drought. If anything, some women think I’m *too* feminine. It’s true—I don’t own a single flannel shirt or

fishing pole. I’ve got that little problem with my voice, but then again, that didn’t stop past dating partners. Instead, I think “transgender” is still a bit too out there, too unusual for a Match.com profile. I assume some women—and for that matter, men—wonder, “Does *it* actually look real down there?”

In a word, it sure does. I’m happy to report that one girlfriend—this one didn’t even make it three months—eagerly exclaimed, “I love your surgeon!”

In five years, my status as transgender probably won’t be a big deal. But then again, that’s five years of waiting around. I don’t have time to waste while our culture catches up to me. I’m ready for something serious now.

I do have a plan.

I’m thinking of a billboard on I-94 near the Hennepin–Lyndale Avenues exit. I’ve got a great picture of me wearing glasses—dare I say it’s a bit sexy? Below the picture—blown twenty feet high—the words, “Ladies, how can you resist this? Call me at 1-I WANT ELLIE.”

I can see it now. Traffic backed up in both directions. Women in the west bound lanes stopped to jot down the number. Perhaps cell phone or iPad pictures snapped. On the other side of the highway, rubberneckers vie for a glimpse of the remarkable—and soon famous—billboard.

Yea, that’s the ticket, Ellie. It’s sure to get you a date. □

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**Dear Ms. Behavior:**

I am a 22-year-old lesbian and I always fall for older women. Recently I ended up with a 44-year-old divorced woman who has three children. She was never with a woman prior to me and says she could never have a relationship with a woman. She's waiting for the "man of her dreams"...but in the meantime, the sex is out of this world and I am falling for her BIG TIME.

I know I am just a plaything to her. I outright asked her what the deal was the last time we were together. She said, "I am a raving heterosexual. I would never sleep with another woman. I guess I just have a penchant for you." PENCHANT? Like this is some credential I should post on my resume?

My problem: I am confused as hell, but she is looking for Mr. Right. And I am confused as all hell. Cut the cord or no? And, if so, that is not an easy thing to do. For someone who is a "raving heterosexual" she sure doesn't hold back when we are in her bedroom. Help!!

-HETERO'S PENCHANT**Dear Hetero's Penchant:**

The notion of dismissing a fantastic sexual partner feels tragic to Ms. Behavior. But it's even more crushing to imagine you wasting your time and passion on someone who'll kick you to the curb when the right man comes along.

The biggest problem with this scenario is that you probably won't adequately protect your heart. Penchant Woman will squash you like a bug. Later, when you finally do

meet a great woman who is worthy of your devotion, you'll blow it because you'll be bitter from having squandered your adoration on Penchant Woman. Then you'll torture and damage the great new woman, forcing her to subsequently spread her sorrow to another lesbian, and so on and so on, which will perpetuate the cycle of lesbo pain ad infinitum. It's probably a lot to ask, since you're young and new to this love stuff, but if you practice a little damage control here, you might prevent the extinction of the entire dyke species.

Ms. Behavior realizes that this is probably a longer view than you want. So, the simpler answer is this: cut the cord with your heterosexual non-girlfriend if you can. Otherwise you risk having her sever it with her teeth, at great expense to both your tender umbilicus and lesbian civilization.

Dear Ms. Behavior:

I am an extremely eligible 40-something gay man, widowed long enough to be interested in dating again but not so long that I haven't been able to shake the awful feeling that I'm some kind of a gay Rip Van Winkle. There are many strange and mysterious things I'm attempting to confront with an open mind, one of which is, What is one supposed to do with those tit rings during sex? Give 'em a tug?

But that's not what I'm writing about. I've never liked bars or really needed them since I seem to attract dating possibilities in my everyday life. In that vein, I'm meeting guys, younger ones, who appear to be

gay in every way and even show signs of sexual interest but – at the end of the day – are straight. Could this be? Is there some growing population of quasi-crypto homos? Or are they more likely to be plain old closet cases? I know you can't answer this question with authority unless you were to meet, interview and perhaps even probe the people I'm talking about. But I would be interested in any advice you have in dealing with them.

-YOURS CONFUSED**Dear Yours Confused:**

Ms. Behavior doesn't need to probe anyone to know that you've been in cold storage for too long. It's possible that you are mistaking plain old Metrosexual men for your gay brethren. It's not your fault: some straight Metro men have fastidious grooming habits reminiscent of homos: back-waxing, excessively clean facial shaving, ball shaving, and leg waxing. They smell like gay men, get mannies and pedis, and are quite friendly, but in a back-patting way (not a blow job way).

So it seems like a good idea for you to go where the homos hang. You need not go to bars if you don't like them (though that could be a reasonable place to start). Find a neighborhood restaurant, a queer theatre group, a gay poodle club, or a Nellie political organization. Your ability to discern who's gay and who's just a little dapper around the edges will soon return.

As a special bonus, you'll probably find someone who can educate you in all manners of pulling or biting his tit ring in just the right way. □

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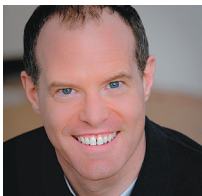


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The Top 5 Wanda Wisdom Ways to Beat the MidWinter Blues

5. Go to KFC. Get two extra-crispy chicken breasts. Stick 'em in your bra. Voila! You're warm AND you have a snack for later. Winter, winter, chicken dinn(t)er?!



4. Grab a friend. Find a frozen Tauntaun. Maybe check parks and, like, the caves in St. Paul. Slice it open. Stick your friend inside. Trek back to the Rebel Alliance and... May the Force be with you.



3. Hot tub bobbing for apples. I said APPLES!



2. Head to the mall dressed as a sexy police officer. Go up to people wearing bell bottoms, saggy pants, mullets, camel toes, and/or booty shorts. Write them a ticket exclaiming, "I'm the fashion police and you're BUSTED!" Don't use a taser.



1. Go outside. It's like 50 degrees people.



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The Lullaby Is Mine

I STILL feel his chest under my head. I still hear his heartbeat—counting the pulses to lull me to sleep.

I still feel his fingers in my hair. His skin beneath my fingertips. His breath on my neck.

I'm 20 years old then, on my bed, inhaling our nighttime fragrance: Listerine and Irish Spring. The streetlamp outside pours into my room, through my curtain-less blinds, eerily... perfectly. The dim light expresses only the vaguest, but most desired, details.

We lay in silence, him petting my hair, us drifting in and out of sleep, desperate to stay awake to savor one another. This is no honeymoon, to be sure. We argue everyday. We yell and say things we don't mean. We make each other cry because that's what happens to people you love: you know their vulnerabilities, and to your attacks, there are no defenses.

But here in this moment, silent and absent of the world and its perils—this moment is perfect. I lift my head and look up at him. He has two pillows behind him because mine are so flat—he hates my house (I'm in college, what can I say?).

"What is it?" he asks.

"Do you still love me?"—a game we play.

He smiles, pinches my cheek, and in an exaggerated Southern accent: "A'course I love you, darlin'. You want me ta steal you away

and go live in da woods? I kill us up some good eatin' for dinner." And he'll throw me on my back, tickle me 'til I cry, and eventually we'll land where we started: my listening to his heart. His twisted-humor, crazy heart.

Moments like these were some of the happiest of my life—the only moments I felt wholly myself, and felt wholly loved for that reason. There, counting his heartbeats. My lullaby.

We all have our lullabies. Lullabies are whispers only we can hear—like the ones we heard as children, quiet comforts that find their way inside and fill you with such security and euphoria that no trouble stands a chance. We feel safe. We feel happy.

Just as we use our loved ones' vulnerabilities to drive them mad, we're capable, too, of whispering to them this way—spotlighting their tenderness to drive them... happy. We hear these whispers from our beaus, we hear them from our mothers, we hear them from the joy we feel when we're proud.

A sappy thought? Probably—I'm that way. I mean, my most euphoric memory is the sound of a heartbeat—how much mushier can you get than that? But it's especially bad this time of year, when romantic comedies tell us we should be cuddling up with our beaus by fireplaces, unfolding quirky, but somehow perfect, romances. (For the record, I HATE romantic comedies.)

Truth is, a lot of us are single right now. And this time of year reminds us of loves past—no matter how normal—or un-sappy—we are. It reminds us of the haunting lullabies we wish we still had, and somehow makes us forget the reasons we got rid of them. Haunting, yes. Laying in bed, next to where he was. Still feeling the rush of our lullaby without him there.

Single or not, happiness isn't guaranteed. Most of us are in a state of perpetual dissatisfaction, maybe in just one realm of life. Some people place this energy on their work (they call it ambition), others in their relationships (they call it romance)—we funnel our frustration into an incessant pursuit of success, because we have a need to always be chasing something—because we've heard our lullaby and we want desperately to rekindle it.

It never strikes you that you've heard your lullaby until it's time to pull away. Getting out of bed at the sound of an alarm clock, prying yourself out of his arms—that's when you realize how good it really is...

And I do. I still feel his chest under my head and his fingers in my hair. I hear his whispers. I taste his kisses. And I always will. Maybe not always with him, but I know my lullaby, and in someone else, I will hear it again.

Happy Valentine's Day. ▣

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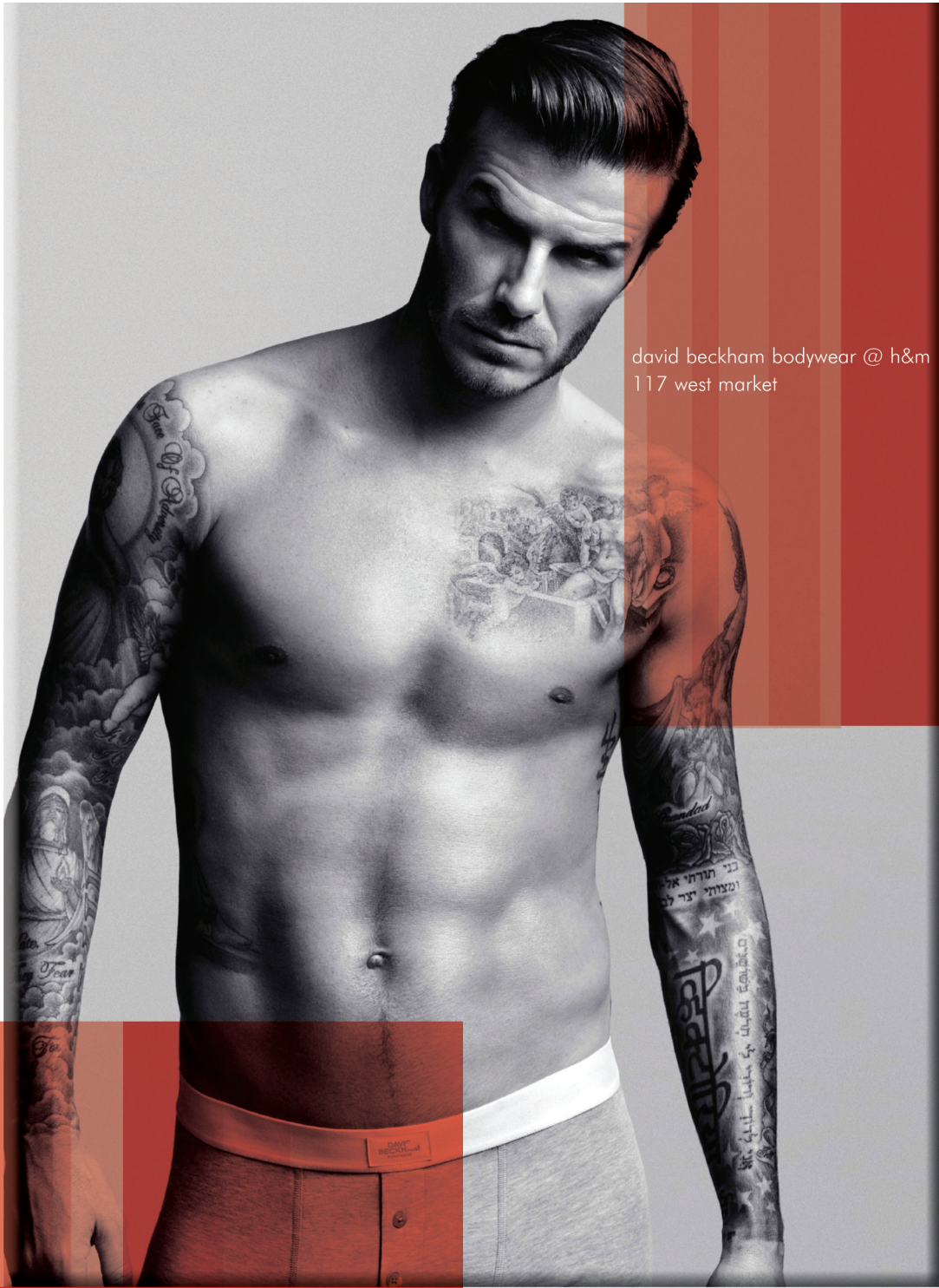
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